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ABSTRACT

Discussion abounds about the quality of rhetoric on computer bulletin boards, chat lines and e-mail. Within the past year the CEDA-L, a bulletin board dedicated to the communication of the Cross Examination Debate Association community, has become one of the most popular avenues for information dissemination. A study examined 1000 messages posted to the bulletin board during the period beginning November 2, 1994 and ending January 19, 1995, and also examined responses to a survey distributed on the system. Of the 107 surveys returned, 78 identified themselves as male, 29 as female. Results showed a similarity between the genders when dictating the number of times that an individual read the bulletin board. A discrepancy arose, however, when comparing those who read only (i.e., non-intrusive observers), and those who read and posted. While men tended to reply openly to the board, women chose to read only or read and post directly to individuals. Also, the utilization of the information found on the bulletin board shows an even greater gender discrepancy. While females use the service for information gathering, to inquire about situations or tournaments, males chose to discuss theory and the outcomes of rounds. Perhaps the most intriguing information was derived from the last portion of the survey dealing with reasons for use or nonuse. Of the 29 female respondents, 6 asked that their name not be used; of the 78 males, none made that request. Additionally, feelings of inadequacy plagued both genders. (TB)

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WOMYN AND THE "L": A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION, GENDER, AND BULLETIN BOARDS

The computer age is upon us, every where you look computer aided communication is occurring. Discussions abound about the quality of rhetoric which one may find on bulletin boards, chat lines and e-mail. Regardless if you are from the school which believes that computer aided communication constitutes written communication or from the school which endorses the belief that the discourse has its grounding in oral communication, one commonalty exist, it is a form of communication . Within the past year the CEDA-L, a bulletin board dedicated to the communication of the Cross Examination Debate Association community, has become one of the most popular avenues for information dissemination. While many studies herald the computer based technology as a great equalizer among the sexes, apprehension and stereotypes still exist which overshadow these high hopes.

This paper will report finding from a study of one thousand messages posted to the bulletin board during the period beginning November 2, 1994 and ending January 19, 1995, as well as responses from a survey distributed on system. Responses and post were examined within the boundaries of gender and context. Findings show a substantial discrepancy between the number of female who subscribe and those who correspond on the system. Additional findings isolate the communication context of the post within the realm of information sharing. Reported factors for the variance included shortage of time to develop responses and lack of self confidence as to the of opinions.

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CLASSIFICATION INFORMATION: GENDER AND POSITION

Discussion of gender and position is never easy, however, this researcher found the mere term gender to be offensive to some individuals. Terms such as "penis burdened members of society" and " apologetically MALE" became independent threads. Although the terms gender and sex are often used interchangeably, the two concepts have very distinct meanings. While an individual's sex is determined by their biological classification, a person's gender is based within their social and psychological make-up. The term gender was chosen to expand and individuals choices, as oppose to being locked into a sexual identity due to birth.

Of the 107 surveys returned, 78 or 72% identified themselves as male, 28% or 29 surveys listed female as their chosen gender. Of the one-thousand post examined 9.7 % were mailed by female participants, with the remaining 903 (90.3%) post being sent by the male population. Additionally, a total of 12 females constituted the 97 post as opposed to 264 males posting the remaining 903 post. The discrepancies in the findings identify a apprehension between posting to an open forum and mailing an individual. This will be examined closer within the context of the paper.

The portion of the survey which identified supervisional position was broken into four distinct segments; Director of Forensic, Assistant Coach, Competitor and Non-Affiliated. Participants added additional titles such as "coach" and "graduate assistant". The breakdown of the 107 surveys identified 14 Director of Forensic, 3 coaches, 8 graduate assistants, 81 competitors and 1 non-affiliated. The non-affiliate identification, a past debater who is currently an attorney who "looks back with great fondness on the

good ol days of debate." The 1000 post could not be identified within this context due to non-gender names.

Correlation between the two factors prove that a majority of the individuals posting to the board are male competitors, with male graduate assistants making the secondary group, closely followed by male DOFs. The female graduate assistants made up the fourth segment followed by female competitors.

USAGE AND INFORMATION UTILIZATION

The study showed a similarity between the genders when dictating the number of times which an individual read the bulletin board. Of the male respondents 62% versus 57% of the female respondents read the bulletin board once a day. With a 32% response, female respondents recorded a higher frequency within the 2-4 times a week slot, as opposed to a 26% male response for the corresponding slot. The 5-7 times a week received the least responses among both the female and male respondents with usage rate of 11% and 12% respectively. Factors such as competition, class and family seem to dictate the consistency of use among both genders. A discrepancy arose when comparing those who read only, a non-intrusive behavior, and those who read and post. The males tended to reply openly to the board, whereas, the females choose to read only or read and post directly to individuals. This researcher feels that this explains the reason for male dominance within the one- thousand open posts examine.

The utilization of the information found on the bulletin board seems to show greater gender discrepancies than prior variables. Most male competitors respondents used the server for entertainment purposes such as ; "....sometimes the "L" is more entraining than Antimanics", "I enjoy seeing people flaming (Sean) Lemoine, its time he got his" and "...its like reading Melrose Place, with the exception that you get to decide who is the blond..." were common. Male DOFs, assistant coaches and graduate assistants felt the service was more useful when based within the activity. Responses such as "I utilize the "L" to gain insight into the national scope of the topic" and "...I feel the "L" offers immediate response to theories and strategies which I am working on. You are almost certain to get a response from someone pointing out the flaws of new ideas. I feel this is more beneficial than the traditional method of developing a theory, testing and publishing by traditional means only to find gaping holes which you overlooked." Female respondents showed little separation within supervisional positions. Female competitors seem to feel more comfortable being judged by someone which appears regularly on the service, "...I know for me, reading a judge's response to different threads gives me more confidence when I find them in the back of the room" and "after reading on the L yesterday that the judge I had this weekend NEVER buys XT it gave me more of an understanding to his decision in our round. I guess I was too pissed to accept his explanation but when I sat in my dorm and read why he never buys Xtra gave me more insight. I just wish I could have read it earlier. Additionally, female respondents within a supervisory position seem to utilize the service for information gathering such as tournament announcements, professional organizations and corresponding with individuals on specific instances. One respondent quotes"...I am new to this area, so you can imagine how hard it is to keep the respect of your students when you do not know the key players. The "L" has taught me that Tuna isn't just a fish but a coach at a Vermont University. The true identity of "Bear"

still eludes me...." Males also listed information gathering as a vital use of the system, however, the information was more generic in nature.

The evaluation of the 1000 posts, proved out the finding that females utilize the service as information gathering, preferring to inquire about situations or tournaments, whereas males chose to discuss more theory and the outcome of rounds.

USER ABILITY AND THE SERVICE

Perhaps the most intriguing information was derived from the last portion of the survey dealing with reasons for use/non-use, as well as hints on the approachability of the service. Of the 29 of female respondents, 6 asked for anonymity for their responses to the questions. These individuals represented each division of rank among those tested. Of the 78 male respondents, not one requested anonymity.

Fear of retaliation, fear that showing weaknesses which may be used against them in a round and "refusal to participate in any forum which degrades individuals for voicing an opinion" tops the list of reasons females choose not to correspond openly on the bulletin board. Specific examples such as "..... I thought people liked Lemoine, with the way everyone flames him makes me wonder what they would say to someone like me, an unknown freshman", "I asked a question on the "L" ONCE, I was really happy to get a lot of helpful answers but when I got to the tournament that weekend I had T ran against me every round. Debaters questioned my ability to run and answer the position because everyone knows "you don't know T"...I will not post again!", "I have questions

concerning the cutting edge theory and have a learned a lot from reading Michael Korcok's post, but after a BAD experience I decided to write him personally.", additionally a female DOF stated that she refused to use the service due to the "open hostility" which was expressed on the service.

Additionally, feelings of inadequacies plagued both genders. Comments such as "I am a national open debater, a senior, if I have a question I will ask it privately" and "I am a freshman novice debater from a small state school, our coach works mostly with the IEers, I don't think I would have much to say that would interest the people who write ..." were commonly recorded. A number of male respondents listed lack of time to fully develop a response and "publishing on the "L" doesn't get me tenure, publishing in hard text does."

Most respondents felt the service was good and filled a needed space in the realm of debate. The immediacy of responses and the timeliness of thread makes up the most appealing aspects of the service's usability. The biggest complaint to user friendliness was the inability to connect or disconnect the service. Thirty one individuals stated it took them over a week, trying consistently to gain access to the service, 17 individuals stated they thought they had discontinued the service over the Christmas break, however, returned to find over 400 post.